



Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry (Irish Studies)

Elizabeth Cullingford

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In this, the first sustained feminist analysis of Yeats, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford resituates his love poems in their cultural and historical context. Yeats himself said that when he started to write verse, "no matter how I begin, it becomes love poetry." Cullingford argues that the politics of sexuality are at the heart of his creative enterprise. From the early lyrics prompted by his frustrated love for Maud Gonne through later works such as "Leda and the Swan," "Among School Children," and the Crazy Jane sequence, she traces the complex intersections between history, aesthetics, and desire.

Cullingford shows how women's demand for emancipation brought pressure to bear on the conventions of love poetry, which idealize woman as an aesthetic object; and how Yeats's revision of these formal conventions modifies his idea of the Irish nation, which has traditionally been represented as female. Yeats described himself as "a man of my time, through my poetical faculty living its history": his love poetry bears the impress of the shifting balance of sexual power and the struggle to define a postcolonial Irish identity.

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